



CITY OF FALLS CHURCH

DATE: January 30, 2009

TO: Mayor Gardner and City Council Members
Chair Lawrence and Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Sue Cotellessa, General Manager for Development Services/Planning Director
Elizabeth S. Perry, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Conditional Rezoning Application #20081039, 120 N. Lee Street and 609 Park Avenue

The subject application by Pirouz Khanmalek of Espinzar, LLC (applicant) is for a conditional rezoning of approximately 30,000 square feet of land area on the corner of N. Lee Street and Park Avenue from the T-1 District to the B-1 District to allow for a three-story building with first floor retail and restaurant uses, and two floors of office use. The application booklet describing the project and the only public comment received on the project to date are attached. Highlights of the project include:

- 100% commercial redevelopment;
- consistent with several aspects of the Comprehensive Plan;
- consistent with the City's adopted Design Guidelines, most notably with the extensive use of brick as a building material; and
- building height comparable to that which would be permitted by right in the T-1 District.

Staff has reviewed the application and provided the applicant with comments. The most critical issue for staff is the proposed parking. Staff finds the ratio of on-site parking spaces to the square footage proposed in the project to be insufficient, and the greatest challenge to providing a redevelopment that is appropriate for the location, and compatible with adjacent property and land uses.

After the applicant has received comments from the Council and Planning Commission at worksession, staff recommends that the Council direct the applicant to work with staff and, more specifically, with the Planning Commission through worksessions, to improve the parking conditions, as well as to identify opportunities for mitigating other anticipated impacts of the project. The applicant will also need to respond to staff comments, and supplement the application by conducting a transportation impact analysis and presenting any proposed proffers. Upon revision and resubmission of the application, and subsequent staff review, the application could be presented to Council at another worksession and, if appropriate, scheduled for First Reading.

Existing conditions

The subject property is currently zoned T-1, Transitional 1. 120 N. Lee Street is developed with a two-story office building, and 609 Park Avenue is developed with a structure that looks like single-family detached dwelling, but has been converted for use as an office. Both properties have parking lots to support their respective uses: 120 N. Lee has two parking lots and two curb cuts; 609 Park Avenue has one parking lot and curb cut.

Many of the properties adjacent to the subject property are medium-density residential (zoned R-1B) and office (zoned T-1): Across the street on Park Avenue is a neighborhood of single-family detached homes; some of the residential-looking structures along Park Avenue and on N. Lee across from the subject property have been converted to offices. The Broadway, which abuts the subject property to the south, at the corner of N. Lee Street and W. Broad Street, has a mix of restaurant, retail and residential uses.

The Comprehensive Plan Existing Land Use Map designates the subject property as Office. The Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Map designates the entire 600-block bounded by N. Lee Street, Park Avenue, Pennsylvania Avenue and W. Broad Street – which includes the subject property – for Mixed-Use. As the block is currently developed with a mix of residential, office, restaurant and retail uses, it currently complies with the Future Land Use Map designation.

Proposed development

Rezoning from the T-1 District to the B-1 District allows for higher density development and a greater mix of land uses. While office use is permitted in the T-1 District, the B-1 District allows restaurant and retail uses, whereas the T-1 District does not; the B-1 District is not subject to a lot coverage limitation, whereas the T-1 District is limited to 40%; and the B-1 District allows for a greater building envelope due to smaller setback requirements than the T-1 District. However, it is noted that while the B-1 District allows for a maximum building height of 55 feet, the application proposes a structure of approximately 47 feet in height, which is very close to the permitted by-right height in the T-1 District (45 feet). The proposed development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map by further diversifying the mix of uses with restaurant and retail uses where, currently, only office use exists.

Design: The building scale, complexity, design elements, and building materials complement the character of existing and proposed development, and appears to be consistent with the City's adopted Design Guidelines. The guidelines note that masonry is the most appropriate material for commercial buildings. The current application indicates the building will be brick; however, staff is concerned that the applicant has indicated proposed building materials may change. With regard to site design, the applicant indicates that he is no longer seeking an easement from the Broadway and instead will be amending the design. The Architectural Advisory Board will review the application on February 4, 2009.

Parking: The following concurrent approvals would be required to facilitate the proposed parking:

- Use of the mixed-use redevelopment (MUR) parking matrix; and
- A 18.3% parking reduction based on anticipated use of transit; and
- Use of right-of-way for an on-street loading space; and
- Use of right-of-way for on-street parking spaces to serve as required parking; and
- Modification of the restaurant parking ratio from 1:100 to 1:150; and
- Calculating required office parking on net square footage rather than gross square footage; and
- Including spaces for proposed Zipcar and carpools towards satisfying parking requirements.

While staff supports the concept of mixed-use with shared parking, under-parking a development will have impacts, such as increased traffic and overflow of parking into residential neighborhoods. Under-parking the project could also threaten long-term viability because there may not be sufficient parking to accommodate changes in tenants and/or the demand of prospective tenants. In addition, it is noted that two proposed parking areas are not connected, so there may be circulation issues related to the fact that drivers who do not find parking in the first parking area must exit the property and drive around the block to access the second in search of a parking spot. Under-parking a development could further exacerbate the draw-back in the proposed design of the split parking areas. Guidance and comment from the Planning Commission and the Council on parking is sought.